DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 365 PS 019 918

AUTHOR MacNaughton, Glenda; Clyde, Margaret
TITLE Staffing the Practicum: Towards a New Set of Basics through Clarifying Roles.
PUB DATE Jun 90
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the National Workshop on Early Childhood Practicum (1st, Frankston, Victoria, Australia, June 7-8, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Learning; *Competency Based Teacher Education; Early Childhood Education; Feedback; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Mastery Learning; Performance; *Practicums; *Practicum Supervision; Student Teacher Evaluation; *Student Teachers; Supervisors; Teacher Role; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the practicum component of teacher education, particularly as it is implemented at the School of Early Childhood Studies (SECS) of the University of Melbourne (Victoria), Australia. The purpose of the practicum is to socialize students into their profession and give them the opportunity to acquire relevant skills. The three key players in the practicum are the field supervisor, the tertiary supervisor, and the student. The field supervisor's roles include those of counselor, observer, and mentor. One function of the field supervisor is to provide feedback to the student teacher. The skill of providing feedback can be enhanced by in-service training. The role of the student is based on two premises about adult learning: (1) adults learn developmentally; and (2) adults need different periods of time to assume new skills. These premises constitute the basis for the competency-based approach to practicums used by SECS. At SECS, a student assessment procedure that involves the student, the field supervisor, and the tertiary supervisor has been developed. Field supervisors have positively evaluated the triadic assessment used. A seven-item bibliography is included. (BC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED338365

STAFFING THE PRACTICUM: TOWARDS A NEW SET OF BASICS THROUGH CLARIFYING ROLES.

Glenda MacNaughton

Margaret Clyde

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret Clyde
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

First National Workshop on Early Childhood Practicum

Frankston

June 7-8, 1990.

PS 019918

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INTRODUCTION

The Practicum component of any course which trains people to work in the area of human services is possibly the most contentious, the most controversial, possibly the most expensive and the least researched component of the course; it goes under many names including Practicum, Field Studies, In Field Component to name three, and it can be implemented in blocks, a day per week or an internship following the completion of the theoretical components of the course, but, whatever we call it and whatever way it is organised, practicum is seen by most students, most people in the field and most lecturers concerned with practicum, as the most important part of the course.

Here are two quotes to confirm this, one American, one Australian:

> "There is no other sequence of study which has a more profound impact upon the college student than the experience of student teaching. It is almost universally advocated by critics and friends of education alike as a process for teacher certification and its practice is virtually unquestioned."
>
> (Doxey: 1983)

and

> "The practicum has an acknowledged central place in teacher education programs. Trainees consider it the most important, satisfying, relevant, practical, worthwhile feature of their pre-service education. They believe they gain from it; they say it is the most realistic feature of their course; and they want its quantity and quality increased."
>
> (Tisher: 1987)

PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICUM.

What, then, is the purpose of this much debated practicum? It has a two-fold purpose, namely to socialise students in training into their chosen profession and to provide first-hand experience of the "real world" in which the student can acquire the relevant skills under the supervision of an experienced expert in the field, together with support from lecturing staff at the institution at which the student is undertaking the course. The skills to be observed, developed and honed will depend upon the level of the student's own skills and the stage of the course being undertaken. It is becoming increasingly obvious, that for the neophyte teacher or child care worker, it is not sufficient solely to use practicum time to practise and enhance the technical skills of helping children learn and managing them in a group setting, in other words concentrating on teaching as a science. It is equally important to use the time to actively work towards enhancing personal skills and interpersonal relationships and ensure that students learn teaching as an art. It is this change that has prompted the need to rethink the way practicum is organised.

IMPETUS FOR CHANGE IN THE ORGANISATION OF PRACTICUM.

1. Changing Roles within Early Childhood.

The notion for managing the dichotomous skills of "teaching as a science" and "teaching as an art" is assuming greater importance at a time when the early childhood worker is a teacher, a manager, an advocate, an educator and someone who is bound to assume a host of other roles in a rapidly changing world. Skills that students develop must allow them to adapt to these changing roles. This means finding new approaches to preparing

students for both traditional and emerging roles they must play as early childhood workers.

2. Research.

Combined with changing demands on the early childhood worker, research indicates that there still continues to be a proportion of trainees in Australian colleges for whom the practicum is a "confusing, threatening and disappointing experience". (Tisher, 1987). Doxey's (1983) premise seems to not only support this comment, but in fact to lend weight to it, by isolating the two major areas where practicum fails to meet its purpose because there are conflicts between rhetoric and reality; students do not receive the help that they need and field supervisors are often overwhelmed by their role.

3. Implications for the Practicum.

The changing role of the early childhood worker plus ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of the practicum in meeting its traditional roles necessitates an examination of how the practicum can be made more effective. One option for improving the effectiveness of the practicum that has been explored at SECS is the clarification and redefinition of the roles of each of the key players in the practicum.

The "key players" in the practicum are, of course, the student, the field supervisor and the tertiary supervisor. Lack of clarity about roles, duplication of roles and competing understandings about the role of each player have characterised the practicum. This reduces the effectiveness of the practicum in the past. Each can, and should, have a separate, distinct role to play in all three stages of the practicum process; the pre-planning period prior to the practicum, the period during the practicum itself and in the follow up stage on completion of the practicum period.

THE ROLE OF THE FIELD SUPERVISOR.

The traditional roles of the field supervisor have been that of observer and assessor. The literature also indicates that the field supervisor has a key role to play as a counsellor and a mentor (Edwards, 1986).

The counsellor role is important in that it helps to establish a trusting and responsive climate between the field supervisor and the student and relates to the notion that the practicum has a role in the professional socialisation of students.

The observer role is the more traditional role of the field supervisor. It relates to assisting the student with the skills associated with teaching as a science, assisting with planning isolated and sequential learning experiences, keeping child study records, compiling data on organisational and managerial aspects of the role and in providing daily formal and informal feedback to the students on these aspects.

The mentor role is associated with teaching as an art. This relates to assisting the student with skills such as engaging in reflective thinking and demonstrating the ability to be assertive. Such skills are essential if students are going to be able to adapt to the changing roles in the early childhood field. Critical to the effectiveness of each of these roles is the ability of the field supervisor to provide feedback to the students.

"Feedback" is "information which the reporter believes to be true and accurate, on an individual happening or interaction" (Caruso, 1986).

The important thing is that feedback is the link between the "teaching as a science" and "teaching as an art" components of the practicum. It enables students and field supervisors to discuss the day's events, using the field supervisor's observations and

informal "on the run" comments as a basis for the discussion. The student and field supervisor, together, can discuss the learning experiences in relation to the plans and the situation within the centre, they way in which the plans were amended and the decisions taken by the students to amend or adhere to the plans; strengths can be discussed and weaknesses acknowledged so that feedback becomes "a continuous process of collecting information and supplying feedback for improvement" (Levin and Long, 1981:34).

Gradually students should need less help from the field supervisor to reach a defined standard and they may even be able to take over the corrective procedures themselves. In this way, students should become more confident people who not only perform better, but who are better able to analyse their own performance in a critical, reflective way and able to adopt to change.

Feedback therefore acts as a link between the role of observer, mentor and counsellor.

Despite the critical need for this skill within the field supervisor's repertoire, field supervisors are often overwhelmed, overworked and poorly prepared to provide the time and kind of feedback that is so vital to the student's professional development. It is obvious that field supervisors need time and support prior to the practicum in order to develop the necessary skills to carry out their roles of counsellor, observer and mentor.

The crucial skill of providing feedback seems to be one area which can be enhanced by inservice. Research in Australia indicates that inservice programs for field supervisors are valuable, particularly when the workshops are spread over a period of time (Sellars, 1981). At SECS we have developed an inservice program for field supervisors that includes sessions on both role clarification and skill building in the supervisory process,

including feedback. It is hoped this inservice program will provide a supportive foundation for field supervisors in their roles as mentor, counsellor and observer.

THE ROLE OF THE TERTIARY SUPERVISOR.

The lecturer's role is not so clearly defined in the literature. Lecturers have come in for a great deal of criticism over the past few years, possibly because their role has been so ill defined.

> "Acknowledgment of the value or effectiveness of the role played by the tertiary supervisor of practicum is extremely hard to find. This is a controversial role, and over the last decade growing criticism has been levelled at tertiary supervisors (Turney, 1982). Some criticism has been that supervisors 'dash in, observe, evaluate, make a few suggestions about the student's technique, then leave', (Clark, 1984). Other critics have claimed that tertiary supervisors are ineffective because they are overloaded, out of touch, inept and underpaid (Turney, 1982). The act of supervision was seen to be a critical stress factor for students during practicum (Yee, 1969), and a needless drain upon dwindling resources - resources which if re-allocated would make a more significant impact upon presently languishing teacher education programs (Bowman, 1979) ..
>
> Perhaps the criticisms reflect an inappropriate comparison of the role of the tertiary supervisor with the role of the co-operating teacher. Instead of these roles overlapping and mirroring each other, they might more productively complement and balance each other. Yarrow suggests that the two roles should be complementary with the input of the college supervisor seen in a different light (1984)".
>
> (Edwards, 1986)

It is possible to propose four areas of responsibility for the lecturer which can make their roles distinct from and complimentary to the field supervisor's role. Firstly, they can diagnose areas of concern within the student's developing skills often after they have been isolated by the field supervisor; secondly, they can assist the student to translate theory into practice; thirdly they can fulfil an inservice role by sharing their knowledge with the field supervisor and the student and fourthly they can, in collaboration with the field supervisor, encourage and support the student in the "teaching as an art" skills.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT.

Reduction of the amount of time students have in practicum and concerns about the effectiveness raise key questions about how the practicum can best be used to facilitate student's learning and, in doing so, provide clear direction to students about their role during the practicum. Changes in the role of the student during practicum have been made at SECS in an attempt to deal with such concerns. The key change in the role of the student is that the student must assume an active role in designing and planning for their own learning during the practicum. The role of student as a controller of their own learning processes was based on two important premises about adult learning. Firstly, that adults (like children) learn developmentally, i.e. not all students will learn the same skills in the same order to the same level of ability, and secondly, adults (like children) will need differing periods of time to assume new skills.

These two premises constitute the basis for the competency-based approach to practicum used by SECS in its undergraduate courses.

Competency-based learning developed in the late 1960's and early 1970's in the USA as a result of a push for accountability in the professional training of teachers; it was

determined that fewer graduates would be produced but that they would reflect a better level of preparation to teach children. Part of this push for fewer, better trained graduates included an endeavour to relate learning theory, curriculum materials and teaching strategies for the student teacher and to ensure that they developed this understanding in their own way at their own pace. The particular competencies were discussed by the lecturer and student before the period of self-mastering began - in this case the practicum period - and strategies for achieving them were discussed and determined and the student's performance was observed (by the field supervisor) to determine whether or not the competencies were achieved.

In recent years the concept of competency-based learning has been seen as synonymous with mastery learning which implies that all students are capable of learning and that instructors have the responsibility for working with the students until they succeed. While such a definition implies a behaviourist basis for such a learning process, the SECS is in the process of using the positive characteristics of such an approach to the practicum situation. The SECS approach allows students and field supervisors to assume a greater responsibility for the student's performance during the practicum placement. The student takes a key role in designing their own learning during the practicum. This includes deciding which competencies they will select as a focus for the practicum. developing strategies to ensure that they work effectively on the competencies, regularly evaluating their own progress and contributing to the assessment decision about the extent to which they have progressed. The learning is self-directed and self-evaluated with support from both the field supervisor and tertiary supervisor. At the same time the student and lecturer work together to ensure that the student has made an appropriate selection of competencies and has developed relevant learning strategies, which should ensure that the competencies are met by the end of the practicum period.

ASSESSMENT : A SHARED ROLE

However, whilst the field supervisors, tertiary supervisors and students each have distinct roles within the practicum, one role should be shared by all three - that of assessment. The evaluative processes associated with assessment can be fairest and most effective if each person involved in the practicum shares their perspectives and knowledge during the assessment. Each person will have differing information, which when combined, can provide a fuller and more accurate picture of the development of the student during the period of the practicum. Traditionally the field supervisor and tertiary supervisor have played a role in assessment. At SECS we have developed an assessment procedure which involves the student, the field supervisor and the tertiary supervisor in the decisions about a student's progress and level of competence achieved in a practicum. We have labelled this process "triadic assessment" for want of a better term.

Students therefore have an additional role to play within the practicum but the role is consistent with the move to greater student directed learning.

PRINCIPLES OF THE TRIADIC ASSESSMENT.

At the end of the practicum period the field supervisor, student and lecturer meet together for a prolonged period of time to discuss the student's progress in mastering the selected competencies. During this triadic assessment process students speak from their record of work during the practicum, detailing the progress they have made towards meeting a particular list of competencies. The field supervisor, who has provided feedback to the student throughout the practicum period, also provides input during the triadic assessment process. As a member of the triad the tertiary supervisor will also make comments based on their observations of the student. However the key role played by the tertiary supervisor is that of facilitating discussion on the student's

progress. In particular the tertiary supervisor ensures that a detailed analysis of the student's progress on any given competency is achieved prior to a decision being reached on the student's level of competency. This analysis involves reflection on information from each member of the triad and evaluation of the student's progress by each member of the triad. The lecturer may provide details of the way in which other students have mastered the particular competency, but usually a student's achievement is measured against the competency rather than against other student performances.

By a process of consensus it is determined whether or not the student has met each of the nominated competencies. If the student has not been successful in meeting the chosen competencies decisions are taken about what type of experience would be of most benefit to the student. This may involve an opportunity to practise at a subsequent practicum or a period of practice in another setting, such as the Children's Centre. This is generally an option used for students who are considered to be at risk of not achieving an appropriate level of competence within the normal practicum period. This acknowledges the premise that all students do not achieve skills at the same rate.

THE REACTIONS TO THE CHANGES IN ROLE.

Since SECS first piloted the competency-based approach to practicum and the introduction of triadic assessment there has been an ongoing process of review and evaluation of the changes. This process has highlighted significant support from each member of the triad to the changed roles. It has also highlighted some benefits that were not initially envisaged.

Field supervisors have consistently evaluated the triadic assessment positively. Results from the 1989 evaluation of field supervisors responses (a postal questionnaire) reflect

the trend that has been evident sincie the first evaluation in 1986.

1989 Evaluation of Competency-Based Assessment of Students in Practicum:

N = 150 (Field Supervisors of Undergraduate Students)

1. Overall reaction to the Triadic Process -

   99.2% rated it as useful to very positive

   7.1% were neutral in their ratings

   0.7% rated it negatively

2. Reaction to Triadic Assessment Discussion

   87.0% rated it as useful to very useful

   11.5% rated it as OK

   0.7% rated it negatively

3. Accuracy of Report of Triadic Assessment in Reflecting Students Ability

   76.2% rated it as useful to very useful

   16.5% rated it as OK

   7.2% rated it negatively.

Optional comments supported the rating scales.

There has been less certainity about the competencies. Most of the concerns raised about using the competencies as the basis for assessment have centred around the wording of specific competencies rather than the process itself. As a result we have reviewed and refined the competencies based on feedback from the field.

Most noteworthy in the 1988 evaluation of tertiary supervisors' responses to the triadic system of assessment was the similarity of responses to those received from field supervisors. All staff that responded saw the system as "very positive" or "useful".

Negative comments related to the time pressures they felt with the number of triadic assessments they needed to do in the final days of the practicum. This has been modified slightly for 1990.

Students have consistently indicated a positive reaction to the triadic assessment, particularly highlighting the value of the open communication it fosters and the opportunity for them to assume a more responsible role in the assessment process.

CONCLUSION

The triadic assessment which involves a shared, but redefined role, for each of the key players in the practicum has been a positive advance. The process of clarifying and redefining the roles of each member of the triad DURING the practicum has been more problematic and open to question and debate. Many field supervisors believe that the tertiary supervisor should be sharing the roles of observing, counselling and being a mentor. This is despite the fact that many also recognise that the time spent by tertiary supervisors within centres does not allow for these roles to be effectivley performed by the tertiary supervisor. Many have also commented postively on the increased responsibility they have undertaken and feel that this provides an important recognition of their professional contribution to student learning. The triadic discussion has proved to be a valuable tool for discussing and renegotiating those roles with the field supervisors and students. Our experiences have highlighted that to change and redefine roles is a process that takes time. Inservice is one vehicle we have used to help this process but the power of the triadic to assist in the process indicates that the triadic may also be a valuable inservice mechanism, not just a better way of assessing students.
In addition our attempts to overcome perceived weaknessess in the existing assessment

procedure have provided options to the more traditional roles and responsibilities at a time when the federal government is looking closely at the costs in existing practicum procedures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Caruso, Joseph J. & Fawcett, M. Temple (1986), Supervision in Early Childhood Education: A Developmental Perspective, Teachers' College Press, New York.

Doxey, Isabel (1983), The Field Practice Component of Early Childhood Education Preservice Training Programs, USA, ED239 770.

Edwards, Margaret (1986), "Student Perceptions of Valued Characteristics of Tertiary Supervisors of Practicum", BEd Thesis, Melbourne.

Hall, Gene E. & Jones, Howard L. (1976), Competency Based Education: A Process for the Improvement of Education, Prentice-Hall Inc. New Jersey.

Katz, Lillian G. (1981), "A Matrix for Research on Teacher Education", South Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, Vol 9 (1) pp 19-30.

Machado, Jeanne M. & Meyer, Helen C. (1984), Early Childhood Practicum Guide, Delmar Publishers Inc. New York.

Tisher, Richard D. (1987) "Australian Research on the Practicum during the Last Decade" in Hughes, Phillip (ed), Better Teachers for Better Schools, Australian College of Education, Victoria.